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Communication in Third World Countries

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COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Communication is the process through which human beings interact, share information and ideas. As such, it is the very basis of our civilization, the foundation upon which the progress of centuries has been built. Today, communication can mean many things — people talking to each other or satellite technology which allows millions around the world to witness instantaneously the first moon landing. This latter aspect of communication — telecommunication or the technology of communication at a distance — plays a pervasive role in our world with an impact on commercial, industrial, political, social and governmental activities. It has become the lifeblood of modern society without which our system would grind to a halt.

At present, the means for people to communicate and so gain access to knowledge is unequally shared, both among and within countries. Many developing countries do not have the basic communication facilities we take for granted. Africa, for example, publishes one per cent of all books printed in the world — a figure which has remained unchanged since 1960 — and in some countries newspapers and magazines are rarities, particularly outside urban centres. Eighty per cent of all television sets in the world are located in industrialized countries and of the 550 million telephones in use around the globe, some 75 per cent are found in only eight countries, one of them being Canada.

There are great discrepancies in developing countries, especially between urban and rural services. Communication with remote, isolated areas is often impossible. In Tanzania, for example, rural areas account for only 6.4 per cent of telephone distribution even though they contain 93 per cent of the total population. What facilities do exist are usually in a poor state of repair, and in peak hours they are often overloaded to the point of collapse. New subscribers usually face a waiting period of several years. The communication system was such that until recently many developing countries could not even contact each other directly. Telephone calls from one African country to another, a few

hundred kilometres away, had to be routed through London or Paris — a legacy of the colonial period.

Despite this situation, communication has not been seen as a priority in the Third World. Not surprisingly, emphasis was given to pressing problems in the health, population, agriculture, energy and transportation sectors. As a result, communication projects were ad hoc, sporadic and poorly integrated into overall development plans. But this is changing. The importance of communication in development is becoming apparent for it is one of the major components of a country's basic infrastructure. Communication is embedded in the process of satisfying basic human needs and making most institutions work.

With improved communication, some of the physical constraints can be removed from all sectors of the economy leading to increased modernization and productivity. Communication media can also be a means to inform, educate and motivate people, encouraging them to participate in development, thereby making it self-sustaining.

Recognizing the key role of communication in development, many developing countries are making efforts, some with technical support from bilateral and multilateral donors, to build up their communication facilities.

CANADA'S ROLE

Canadians are among the world leaders in all forms of communication, not only in their capacity to produce the technology, to maintain and operate it, but also to make it work for people in a meaningful way. Canada has a widely recognized capability in such fields as basic telephony, radio and television, as well as more exotic technologies like communication satellites, fibre-optics, office communication, and videotex technology.

Canadian expertise stems from harsh and complex national challenges of geography and history. Canadians, for example, have had to find innovative ways of joining together the main metropolitan centres of the country as well as reaching people in isolated communities of the far north. They have had to

span a great landmass plagued by extreme winter conditions and wildly-fluctuating temperatures. Canadians have risen to the challenge, and they have done so in a way which meets multi-linguistic, multi-cultural needs.

Canada has a longstanding tradition in using communication media and techniques to foster the participation of all groups in the life of the nation. The farm radio forum — now used around the world — was invented by Canadians in the 1930s to spread agricultural innovations among sparsely-settled farmers and their families. Today, satellite communication lets the Inuit peoples exchange information through television and radio programs which they themselves create.

As a Canadian public policy, facilities for telephony data and broadcasting have been extended to most remote areas and these media have been developed in ways which encourage access and participation by all groups within society.

Canadians have proven that they are good at communication and they are sharing their expertise in development projects around the world. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio-Canada and the National Film Board have lent their expertise to the development of radio, television and the use of film in developing countries. A number of Canadian universities have pioneered the use of television, radio and other techniques in formal and non-formal education and community development.

Numerous Canadian companies are working through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in telecommunication projects throughout the world: SPAR of Montreal in Brazil and Bangladesh, Raytheon Canada of Waterloo in Indonesia, AEL Microtel of Vancouver in Rwanda, Crandall and Associates of Moncton in Tanzania and Acres of Niagara Falls in Sri Lanka.

CIDA'S CONTRIBUTION

CIDA, through its Bilateral and Special Programs channels, is working on some 30 telecommunication projects worth over \$200 million in some 20 different countries or

regions. Some of these projects are components of larger projects in sectors like agriculture and transportation and many have substantial training components. The projects cover a very wide range of communication; many of them are of the nature of special services not readily available from the local communication agencies — e.g. air navigation, agriculture including fisheries and forestry, coal mining.

CIDA also contributes to multilateral agencies which, in recent years, have been increasing their commitments to communication projects. These include United Nations organizations such as the Unesco International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the regional development banks.

TELECOMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The Third World cannot derive the full benefits of the many recent advances in electronics and communication without reliable, modern internal and international communication systems. The problems these countries face in establishing such systems are, of course, immense. Although technical problems invariably exist, the main constraints are institutional and financial. Most countries are plagued by a severe lack of infrastructure. There is little domestic telecommunication manufacturing and so most equipment has to be imported. Further, there is a scarcity of people with the skills — both technical and managerial — necessary to plan, operate and maintain a communication system. A high attrition rate compounds the problem as those few people with the required skills frequently move into more lucrative sectors.

Finally, telecommunication programs require intensive investments of capital, of trained personnel, and of highly industrialized equipment and materials and have to compete — often unsuccessfully — with other sectors for limited financial and human resources. Even when the investment is made, and the communication system established, profits are rarely re-invested in communication; rather

they are moved to other sectors less intensive in imports.

CIDA is helping many developing countries overcome these problems and establish communication systems. The projects are as different as railway communication in Tanzania (to keep track of trains over hundreds of kilometres of isolated terrain), navigational aids for aircraft in over 20 countries (Canada helped to establish a pioneer airways service into remote areas of Indonesia and installed navigational aids for passenger safety), training for satellite communication staff in Brazil, and establishing a computer centre to replace a manual-accounting system dating back to colonial days in Swaziland.

The benefits from such CIDA projects are many and varied. In Senegal, a telecommunication network for the fisheries fleet is contributing to less fish spoilage and higher profits. In Thailand, CIDA is providing an earth-resources satellite terminal and signal processing upgrading, the benefits of which will be used in over 20 sub-sectors of the economy, including forestry and water resources control and crop management.

In Colombia, the benefits are of a different and more priceless nature. Each year spring floods claim an average of 130 lives and cause \$25 million in damages. CIDA contributed telecommunication equipment and technical assistance to help establish and operate a flood forecasting and warning system. Yearly flood losses are expected to drop by 25 per cent.

The Basic Telephone System

Developing countries face the problem of an insatiable demand for the basic telephone system. When new facilities are introduced they are almost always immediately overloaded. Supply simply cannot keep up with demand. It is not a question of devoting more resources to communication, for the resources are just not available to create a telephone system of the standard we know in the western world.

It is therefore important that those resources which are available are used to achieve maximum impact. The difficult task is to deter-

mine what is best suited to a country's needs. Is it the construction of a new telephone network or the upgrading of an existing one, or is it a satellite communication system which is most required? Besides the question of need, factors such as cost and the ability to operate and maintain a communication system must also be considered.

Once the type of system required has been established, the challenge is to design and develop a system that is flexible, easy to maintain, slow to become obsolete, economically appropriate and has a potential for growth.

CIDA is working on such a system in Rwanda, "the Switzerland of Africa", where a complex network of steep, dirt roads plagues transportation. Bad all year round, the roads are impassable during the rainy season when the red soil turns to mud. CIDA is helping to link two major centres in Rwanda — Butare and Cyangugu — which, at present, have only one telephone line, overworked and often out of order. The CIDA system will allow a potential 900 channels. Rwanda will not use all of them immediately. Rather, it will grow into the system, adding telex lines and other services as the need arises.

COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Helping countries to develop their human resources is a major priority of CIDA's because the Third World's people are its most important resource. Development communication can play an important role in giving people the skills required to achieve social and economic progress. In recognition of the contribution communication can make, CIDA, through a variety of channels, is helping countries:

- not only to build their communication infrastructures, but also to train people to use them in support of development;
- to realize the potential of the mass media and new communication technologies to relieve grave educational problems;
- to use the communication process as a support to the development process.

The following examples illustrate briefly how CIDA is helping developing countries in these areas:

Training of journalists and broadcasters

For more than a decade, Canada has cooperated with educational institutions in Francophone Africa in the training of professionals in mass media communication. Such initiatives have included cooperative programs among the *Centre d'études des sciences et techniques de l'information de l'Université de Dakar, Senegal (CESTI)*, *l'Institut supérieur des sciences et techniques de l'information de Yaoundé, Cameroon (ISSTI)*, University of Montreal and, more recently, *l'Institut international de la communication, Montreal*.

More than 500 journalists and broadcasters from 15 countries have benefitted from this training and are now working in communication facilities in West Africa. Many of the graduates are engaged in health promotion, agricultural extension work, promotion of community development and the establishment of rural radio and community press.

With Canadian assistance, CESTI recently established a research and training program in the use of communication in rural development.

International Program for Development of Communication (IPDC)

IPDC was established in 1981 to help developing countries identify their needs in communication and to mobilize additional international resources. Canada has been a member of the 33-country council and contributed \$250,000 to the special account for communication projects.

The more than 40 projects approved in 1982 included the development of the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) which will permit, for the first time, the direct exchange of news and information among national news agencies of African countries.

Educational use of the mass media

York University of Toronto and Jamia Millia University in New Delhi are cooperating with CIDA's Special Programs Branch in developing a communication centre in India for the production of 16 mm educational films. When broadcast through India's new domestic communication satellite, these films will bring information on health care, nutrition and agricultural innovations to thousands of Indian villagers who have had no opportunity to participate in development because they can neither read nor write.

In Jamaica, CIDA is cooperating with World Literacy of Canada in a pilot project in the use of drama as an educational tool for creating community awareness and problem-solving techniques in five sugar cooperatives. The University of Guelph, with assistance from CIDA, is passing on homegrown techniques to increase agricultural production through the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network (DCFNRN). DCFRN is the brainchild of former CBC farm broadcaster George Atkins who travels throughout Third World countries collecting tips on farming. These have included making harness or door hinges out of old tires, digging pit silos to store hay during the dry season, and replacing expensive concrete with a mixture of mud and dung as building material.

Atkins tapes the techniques he learns in his travels and they are sent out in English, French and Spanish to 650 broadcasters in over 100 countries. Local farm broadcasters adapt the information to their own environment and translate it into local languages.

Project Support Communication

It is increasingly recognized that many development projects of the last two decades have not met all their objectives because the ultimate beneficiaries were neither informed or consulted nor encouraged to participate in a meaningful way. It was assumed that once the wells were dug, the roads built, and the agricultural machinery provided, the people would automatically change their attitudes and practices.

It frequently did not happen. And not because the awareness of the importance of communication was not there. But just as the process of development was seen primarily as the provision of goods and services to the people, communication was conceived as a static, one-way flow of information from the professionals to the masses. Yet it is the poor who are the experts in poverty.

Experience has shown the importance of the exchange of information to the development process. Deeply held attitudes and beliefs govern people's practices, and development planners now accept that cultural, social and environmental factors must be taken into account in designing projects. For overcoming poverty is not only a question of alleviating material needs. It also involves overcoming a lack of knowledge, information and motivation, so that the individual can participate in improving the well-being of self, family, and community.

Communication techniques and appropriate media can play an important role in encouraging people to participate in the development process whether it be in health care projects, agricultural development, the provision of safe water and sanitation or the better use of energy resources.

In Pakistan, for example, CIDA has found that supplying vaccines to immunize children against killer diseases is not enough. We must help mothers understand the life-giving qualities of that vaccine. Similarly, sinking tube-wells to provide safe drinking water does not alone have much effect on rates of water-borne disease. People must understand the connection between poor water and ill-health and be motivated to use the well-water and maintain the wells.

In the poorest area of Nepal, in a region virtually untouched by the outside world, CIDA is involved in a rural integrated development project where communication played a central role in the planning process. Two years were spent meeting with people in almost every village in the region to determine what their problems and needs were. A development program was established, with community participation its cornerstone. Village councils provide overall plans containing the desired projects for input into the program. The pro-

cess is such that the overall strategy can be adapted to include the needs of the people as they change over time.

In northern India, CIDA is funding a project using videotapes as a catalyst in effecting rural change. Communication specialists from Memorial University in Newfoundland, adapting approaches originally pioneered in out-port communities, are working with the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI) to encourage poor farmers to form milk cooperatives.

Animators help to improve communication between social groups by getting individuals to identify their problems and express how they feel about them on tape. Screenings provoke amazing reactions, as witnessed by this description by the project director in the village of Taprana:

It was one of the great evenings in Taprana. Everybody, it seemed, turned out — women in front of one video set, men in front of the other, squatting or sitting on the sun-parched mud, children racing around to see them both.... They were enchanted, excited, shrieking with laughter at familiar things now seen on the screen.... Everybody got on camera after that; everybody learned how it might be possible that the Taprana people could use the technology as a powerful messenger service.

The videotape not only helps to create dialogue but encourages people to recognize shared problems and the potential of group action through a consensus on possible solutions.

A short film on the project has been produced by Memorial University for distribution in both India and Canada. It will have applications in many situations where rural development is hampered by inadequate communication.

Increasing Importance Given to Context of Communication

Two decades ago, Canadian media prophet Marshall McLuhan predicted that communication would unify the world into a global village. The networks of instant-contact

satellites, computerized message switching centres, data banks, video-tape players and miniaturized audio-visual equipment are rapidly making that prediction a reality. The challenge, for development planners, is how to use the enormous potential of this technology for the most benefit. They, as yet, do not have all the answers. But, increasingly, they are asking some of the right questions on the role of communication in social and economic development.

WORLD COMMUNICATIONS YEAR

"Everyone has the right... to seek, receive and impart information... through any media."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Recognizing that this right is severely limited for many of the world's peoples by lack of the infrastructures of communication, the United Nations has declared 1983 as World Communications Year (WCY). The goal is to promote balanced social and economic development by speeding up the establishment of communication infrastructure — a hardware of communication, ranging from telephones to satellites — in various parts of the globe.

The WCY thrust has not been limited to the infrastructure of communication, however urgent — it is also looking at the human and cultural dimensions.

Canadian contributions to the Year include:

- a conference of representatives of some 40 countries in Montreal to consider how the new technologies of communication — including those in which Canada is a leader — can serve the needs of developing countries;
- a World Conference of Community Oriented Radio Broadcasters, sponsored by *l'Association des radios communautaires du Québec*, and supported by CIDA and the Department of Communications.

ANNEE MONDIALE DES
COMMUNICATIONS
WORLD COMMUNICATIONS
YEAR
AÑO MUNDIAL DE LAS
COMUNICACIONES



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